
Title: The Wraith - Vol. IV

Author: Anaq

I found it, seemingly
rummaging through a bush
of succulent red berries
on the edge of the
expansive lake. If I was
to fight it, I was to
fight it now, before I
lost a single ounce more
of my strength. The fires
of revenge lit in my
heart again at the sight
of the wraith, they would
keep me moving — even
if the cold was trying
hard to turn my bones
to ice. My desire to slay
the beast was all my
mind's eye was fixated
on; that, and getting to
the juicy berries on the
bush behind it. We
farmed these berries all
the time. They grew on
the slopes of the
mountains just outside
the village in abundance,
although most were
unreachable up the side
of great, snow-covered
clefts. They were delicious
and hearty. They'd keep
me going a little longer.
With my heart pounding
and my palms sweating
despite the bitter, bitter
cold, I drew my sword
with a clatter of steel.

The wraith spun around in
a smooth, gliding motion,
its glowing blue eyes
immediately found me.
They were empty, soulless;
without any humanity or
emotion. They just glowed
a hollow glow. Its eyes
were set inside a narrow,
elongated and pointed

skull, grey and bare. A skull more like an ox's than a man's. From the skull grew a spine, of large bones as big as a fist that slowly trailed off into smaller pieces, until one, pointed bone hung about a foot from a ground. Just below its head, two arms sprang seemingly from nowhere. Attached not to shoulder blades nor its spine. To the arms were fixed giant claws, each longer than my forearms, thin, curved and sharp. There was no muscle, flesh or skin on the wraith. Nothing holding its bones together but a thick fog of glowing blue dust that clung to its form. Legend has it that a stroke of a sword through the spine would sever the magic that bound this ancient monster together, and the wraith would simply crumble.

I was about to find out if that were true.

As it approached, the beast's gaze bore into me. It moved slowly, seemingly cautious. Stopping and starting, edging closer. I gripped my sword with both hands, raised it as steady as I could and prepared to swing. But about ten feet away, the wraith stopped. It let out a hollow snort. Again, the noise was metallic, an unusual sound for a living creature to make. To my surprise, it didn't charge, leap or race towards me, slashing its talons. The wraith simply turned and started to glide away. Ignoring my presence, my stance, my willingness to

fight. It was just leaving.
I was frozen, not by the
cold, but by disbelief.
Where was it going? Why
wasn't it trying to tear
me apart? My confusion
turned to anger. Did it
think it could just kill
my father and get away
with it? Did it think I
would just let it float
away?

"No!" I screamed, my
voice echoing across
expanse before me.

It didn't even turn
around. It just kept
moving towards another
patch of berries nearby.
I'd had enough. I started
to run. The snow thinned
by the lake's edge,
allowing swifter movement.
I held my sword high. I
was going to kill it. I
was going to take my
revenge. One slice, across
its back. It was too easy.
But I was going to do it.
For my Father. For my
companions. For th...
My foot caught the lip
of a concealed rock
beneath the snow and I
tumbled forward, sword
flung from my hands. I
landed face down in the
snow, and my strength
evaporated in that
moment. My body was so
battered, so achy, so cold
that it hurt. I couldn't
bring myself to rise. I
could just lay here and
die. I steeled what little
resolve I had and rolled
over to face the sky.
Above me I saw blue, but
I wasn't the soft blue
of a clear sky. It was
darker, and shimmered in
the sunlight. The wraith
was above me, its long,
gangly, claw-ridden arms
either side of my head.
It gazed down, arching its

spine, peering at me. I
prepared myself for the
end.

Yet again, the wraith
shocked me.

After a moment of
curiosity, it moved on,
far more interested in
the berries than me.
Hauling myself to my
feet, I grasped at my
sword on the ground
beside me, dug it into
the ice and used it to
prop myself up as I
stood panting, watching
the ancient being. I didn't
understand. The wraith
leaned over the bush,
using its claws to cut
away thicker branches and
dead foliage. Taking a
long, jagged breath, it
made a sound like howling
wind blasting through a
cave. How it breathed
without lungs I'll never
know, but it seemed to
do so all the same. The
bush rustled as the
wraith inhaled, and began
to wither, the berries
turning from a cherry-red
to mouldy black. Their
plump and juicy shape
sagging and oozing. The
wraith moved on to yet
another bush. There were
plenty in this exposed
part of the mountains.